

the first conveyor means is a nip between a first and a second roller [or set of rollers] and the second conveyor means is a nip between the second and a third roller [or set of rollers].

3. (Once amended) A collating device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the support means is arranged to support sheets in the collating station in a position resting against the second roller [or set of rollers].

4. (Once amended) A collating device as claimed in claim 1, wherein the actuator member is movable towards the opening between the guide members so as to urge a collated stack of sheets against the second roller [or set of rollers].

PLEASE ADD THE FOLLOWING NEW CLAIMS:

5. A collating device for sheet material comprising a collating station having a pair of guide members for receiving sheets to be collated through an opening therebetween, first conveyor means for conveying sheets consecutively into the collating station and second conveyor means for conveying a collated stack of sheets out of the collating station, support means comprising a flexible member biased towards a position for supporting sheets in the collating station away from the second conveyor means, and an actuator member movable to urge a collated stack of sheets towards the second conveyor means against the bias of the support means, wherein the first conveyor means is a nip between a first and a second roller and the second conveyor means is a nip between the second and a third roller, and the support means is arranged to support sheets in a position resting against the second roller.

6. A collating device for sheet material comprising a collating station having a pair of guide members for receiving sheets to be collated through an opening therebetween, first conveyor means for conveying sheets consecutively into the collating station and second conveyor means for conveying a collated stack of sheets out of the collating station, support means comprising a flexible member biased towards a position for supporting sheets in the collating station away from the second conveyor means, and an actuator member movable to urge a collated stack of sheets towards the second conveyor means against the bias of the support means, wherein the flexible member is mounted adjacent the opening between the guide members.

7. A collating device for sheet material comprising a collating station having a pair of guide members for receiving sheets to be collated through an opening therebetween, first conveyor means for conveying sheets consecutively into the collating station and second conveyor means for conveying a collated stack of sheets out of the collating station, support means comprising a flexible member biased

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towards a position for supporting sheets in the collating station away from the second conveyor means, and an actuator member movable to urge a collated stack of sheets towards the second conveyor means against the bias of the support means, wherein the actuator member is mounted across the guide members to form a closed end of the collating station.

REMARKS

Upon entry of the present amendment claims 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 have been amended, claim 4 has been cancelled, claims 8, 9 and 10 have been added, and claims 1-10 are pending.

Claim 1 has been amended to clearly specify that the support means is a flexible member and supports the sheets in position between the first conveyor means and the second conveyor means. In addition it has been clarified that the actuator member is movable to urge a collated stack of sheets against the bias of the support means and overcomes the bias to eject the collated stack.

None of the documents cited by the Examiner shows this unique combination of features. Takagaki discloses a set discharge tray for a photocopying machine. It has a collating station 21, a set of guide members 25 and a support means 36 receiving sheets from a first conveyor means 47 and discharging the sheets by an actuator member 30 through a second conveyor means 48. However, the support means 36 is a regulating plate (column 2, line 57). The regulating plate 36 retreats from the surface of the tray 21 in synchronization with the take-out motion of a pushing plate 33 (column 3, lines 32-34). Thus this regulating plate is actively moved out of the way before the actuator member (pushing plate) urges the collated stack of sheets out of the collating station. Thus Takagaki has no explicit or implicit disclosure of a flexible member supporting the collated stack and of an actuator member being arranged such as to overcome the bias of the flexible member.

The present invention has considerable advantages since it allows a more continuous use of collating machinery and obviates the need for synchronization of the support means and the actuator when the collated stack is to be ejected.

In Ito, the Examiner suggests that a sheet inverting device includes a support means and that it would have been obvious to combine this into a known collating device. We respectfully disagree particularly because an inverting device is a very different mechanism to a collating device in the field of paper handling. It is a more complex device, usually requiring more parts, and a person skilled in the art, without inventive input, would not normally look to a more complex device in order to find ways of simplifying a known device, as has been achieved by the present invention. In any case, Ito does not suggest a flexible support means having the property of biasing the sheets and wherein the bias can be overcome by the actuating member when the collated stack is to be ejected.